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THE SERVICES OF PRESENT-DAY PHILOSOPHY TO THEOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION

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The philosophy of our day has as great variety as religion. One difficulty in our modern theological world is that the church has built theological systems of the Greek or Roman worlds into its formulas. As these philosophies are almost nowhere taught except in theological seminaries, it is a little difficult for university-trained men to appreciate the truth which our inherited theology expresses. This is very unfortunate. While religion is for us all, theology must be the peculiar property of men who have been taught to think. Can our modern philosophy do for our day what Aristotle and Plato, the Stoic and the Alexandrine, did for their day?

The philosopher is engaged in a task which in many ways is similar to that of the theologian. He is trying to see life and the world as a whole, to interpret the experiences of the here and now in terms of the ideas which represent meanings, purposes, and values. Hence two tendencies have always disputed the field: Some, the empiricists, prize more the here and now—for this is sure and vivid; others, the idealists and rationalists, prize more the generalizations which offer to transcend time and show us the eternal.

In the past it has usually been idealism and rationalism that have appeared to be the friends of theology. It was with Plato's conception of genera and species that doctrines of the Trinity, one in essence, three in person, and of original sin were shaped; it was by Aristotle's conceptions of form and matter that the relation of God and nature, of soul and body, were framed; it was by Descartes'

doctrine that the soul was conceived as a simple substance, and therefore as immortal. Later it was by the transcendentalism of Coleridge and his American followers that a new life was breathed into the theology of the last century. And at present Bosanquet in England and Royce in this country are able representatives of the idealism which would solve all troubling doubts, all clashing contradictions in the Absolute.

Another type of idealism is that of Eucken, who through all his many volumes insists upon the importance of the inner life, of the activity of the spirit. His present vogue would indicate that to his countrymen at least his message has a value. He feared the world's attention was so occupied with material interests as to cause forgetfulness of the activity of the spirit. But he tells us little of what he means by spiritual activity. If, as his most recent book seems to indicate, he finds in the

present German activity—fine as patriotic devotion and loyalty may be—his conception of the life of the spirit, many Americans will refuse to follow. They will say that activity may be as completely “inner” as we please and yet be lacking in certain other important qualities; they will say that idealism is not by its name protected against defects as serious as any that opposing theories have disclosed.

It is to the opposing schools that I wish at this time to call attention. Five notes in their writings are suggestive for theology.

First is the new empiricism. Empiricism has a bad name with theology because it has usually meant that we have no knowledge except of experience and no experience except through sense or feeling. This last half of the doctrine is not real empiricism; it is dogmatism. The empiricism that James advocated in his theories of religious experience as well as in his lectures on pragmatism and the pluralistic universe is an empiricism which bids us to search human nature through and through, to go with open mind into every path where the spirit of man has led, and to include in our view of the world and of life all human activities, feelings, thoughts, whether they are respectably introduced to us or not. This is a note which I believe the minister might well follow in the religious field. The old-time preacher dwelt much upon the religious experience of biblical writers. He dwelt upon the religious experience of a very few types of conversion, but he left unexplored and uninterpreted great regions of religious experience because they were not always so labeled. Pro-

fessor James in his own book, the *Varieties of Religious Experience*, selected chiefly emotional types. He left out the experiences of thought and will. What is still more remarkable, he omitted the great field of social experience, of co-operation, of sympathy, of common purpose. We are so near to what is passing that it is not easy to see it with the eye of an Isaiah. We are likely to use old terms and conceptions rather than to form new ones. There are suggestions in the poetry, the fiction, the drama, and the essay, but there is need of deep and intimate appreciation of all the stirrings and questions of our day in order that one may see what its religion is.

The second note of a present philosophy which is closely related to the new empiricism is the emphasis of Bergson upon the creative aspect of evolution. In the fifty years since Darwin's writings we have passed from the more obvious doctrines of natural selection and the continuity of plant and animal and human life and now are raising the deeper question as to the agencies in the process and the meaning of it all. The earlier theological attitude of challenge gave place to the too easy solution of its difficulties. The fear that evolution banished God from the world was too easily met by the answer that evolution was simply one method of divine creation. We today do not feel that this latter answer is more than a hopeful anticipation of what may one day be the result of long study and analysis. We feel that we must not for purposes of philosophy assume too hastily what faith may offer. We must stand in the river and study the currents

that come within our reach. We must grant that they come from an unknown and that the horizon which binds our vision is not a limit of things but rather a limit of our own vision. Nevertheless for us it marks the range within which we can experiment.

Now the great method of science in examining the world, as we know, is to discover causes and effects, to link together the successive moments of the stream, to find identities. We predict the future only as we find in it elements of identity with past and present. We even make equations and see that the quantity of motion is the same, that the quantity of matter is not diminished. It is easy from this to make the further and quite unwarranted assumption that, because our yardstick of matter and force remains unchanged as we measure and count the atoms and mass, therefore the stream of life itself flows on the same in quantity and quality, and that what shall be is not more nor less than what has been.

It is of this false inference that Bergson's doctrine offers a corrective. Life, human or cosmic, may be conveniently measured for many purposes in terms of atoms, of electrons, of energy; but these measurements, so necessary for estimating the future, for observing its continuity, are yet not adequate to tell the full story. Especially they are not adequate to measure mind itself, which uses them to measure the world. Life as we experience it in the immediate on-go of the feeling and thought is not chopped up into pieces; it is a whole. Nor is it a repetition of past units. Every moment is a new. Evolution is through and through creative. Varia-

tion is a fact as important as continuity, and variation means a something new.

This may not seem to the theologian a great step in constructive thought. It may appear a far cry from creative evolution to the Creator to whom religion has looked as the Father of spirits as well as the Author of the world. There may seem to be no passageway between this very limited and timid groping for the meaning of change over to a divine providence ordering all things with full intelligence, and I should agree that as yet there is no easy transition. But the deeper recognition of the process of life to which such reflection is bound to lead is far more stimulating to genuine constructive work than either the closed system of the scientist or the closed system of the systematic theologian.

A third element in modern thinking is voluntarism. Voluntarism has often played an important part in theology. Jesus said, "If any man willeth to do his will he shall know of the doctrine." The Middle Ages debated long and strenuously which is prior, will or intellect? Descartes found the source of error in our haste to decide before evidence was sufficient. Kant removed knowledge to make room for faith, and Fichte proclaimed that either necessity or freedom is a logically consistent system. One must *choose* between them. But it has been the effort of the modern pragmatist to analyze more thoroughly this old relation of faith and reason, will and intellect. He points out first that our conclusion depends, not only upon thinking straight, but upon what premises we begin with, and it is partly a matter of choice which facts and premises we use. The opposing opinions on

the present war make it more obvious than ever that thinking is no dry light. Conclusions here seem to depend largely on how far back we choose to begin and which facts we play up. But further, the pragmatist claims that the factors or elements in truth—the demands for consistency and continuity, the conceptions of cause, the interpretations of “things”—are constructions of the creative intelligence seeking first to live and act, and that they are all processes through which the mind comes to itself. In the field of comparative religion the tendency is more and more to explain myth by ritual rather than ritual by myth. This would suggest the inquiry how far our Christian doctrine has been shaped by the needs of the soul as these have been felt from generation to generation rather than from more purely intellectual sources, and then the further inquiry, how far the present needs justify a reshaping of truth.

This does not mean that we have a right to believe anything we like, anything that makes us more comfortable. It may be pertinently said that the need for truth is itself the supreme need. But it is none the less in point to note that truth implies both putting questions and finding answers. Natural science puts one kind of questions, chiefly those of cause and effect. Ethics puts at least two: it asks how it is that we behave as we do and judge as we do; it asks also what we ought to do and to judge. Before it can answer this second question completely it must inquire what the consequences will be: will they be good or bad? But the “good” or “bad” must in the last analysis contain a factor of choice, of voluntary attitude.

If we seek religious truth we must recognize that it too means first of all asking a particular kind of question. If we frame this question in the familiar form, Does God exist? we must recognize that it implies at least two prior questions: What do we mean by “God”? and What do we mean by “exist”? Successive ages and varying schools of thought have meant by God, now an invisible helper in war, now a sender of rain, now a defender of right, now a savior from passion, now an eternal being including all reality, now a sovereign, now a father. Evidently the truth of God’s “existence” would have different meanings and differing tests depending on which sort of God we seek. We are not now confident that success in war or a prosperous crop is an infallible test of righteous sovereignty, or that an all-inclusive being is to be identified easily with personal attributes. Ultimately the religious question is not one solely of fact. It implies both fact and values and may be put: Is the world in which we live a world that bears any relation to our moral ends? Is it a world of mechanism or of purpose, of necessity or of freedom?

On this world-old question philosophy is beginning to take a view which is not precisely either of the older views.

On the one hand science is step by step finding uniformity and law. It is reducing the processes of earth and heavens to order—so far it seems to exclude freedom. But on the other hand it is constantly speaking of all this scientific knowledge as a method of control, of utilizing natural forces for human ends. This is freedom. Another

angle of the problem is the twofold question, Is God's will to be done certainly, inevitably, or is it dependent upon human co-operation? What does it mean to be workers together with God? It was the merit of James in all his various writings to sound one note clearly: The universe is not complete, but is in the making. You and I are sometimes called upon for decisions which may contribute to turn the scale for good or evil. Decision is not an empty form; it is real and serious. In such cases truth is made and not merely discovered. It may be then that the triumph of right is not a matter of yes or no, but, as in all past history, a relative process. I suspect that for generations to come this will continue to be the case. The practical religious question from this point of view would be: Can we give to this view of God, of the progress of righteousness, the same power over the more intelligent minds of today which the God of absolute decrees, and with cruder heaven and hell, had for earlier generations and still has for many in our own?

Fourthly, the thought of the time along lines of social psychology is a needed corrective to whatever of the personal and subjective lies in the teaching of voluntarism. To struggle for what I believe, is my duty, but it is none the less my duty to make as sure as I may that my view of right is a right view. My own feeling, my own judgment, is likely to be mistaken, or still more likely to be partial. Social psychology is calling attention to the intimate dependence of our mental life, not only upon the physical organs, but upon the give and take, the interaction of

person with person. The value of the church, of the religious community, has always been one of the factors in theology. But I venture to think that the value of co-operation in thought as well as in organization has never received full appreciation. The Catholic church has realized the tremendous power of organization, but its principle has been that of authority. The Protestant church has been democratic, but has suffered from lack of unity. The problem is how to get the great values of common thought and common purpose while yet remaining true to the principle of democracy.

The fifth element which has value for theology in the thinking of the time is the ethical trend.

Theology at its best has been more ethical than metaphysical. It has thought more of guiding men to better living than of experiencing the mysteries of creation and calculating the future of the cosmos. But the ethics of religion, like its metaphysics, has necessarily borrowed largely from the philosophy of the age. The ethics of Christianity has been very largely legal. It has seen the world from the throne of the ruler or the bar of the judge rather than from the ethical point of view of a community of spirits. This newer ethics is itself as yet uncertain of its categories. It does not know exactly what justice is. It would like to find out, but it does not expect to find out by any process of intuition or of deduction from definitions of equality, or of giving every man his own, or of respecting the rights of others—definitions and methods which were so easy to our fathers, who thought it possible to know what belonged to a

man or what his rights were. In theology we might assume that we thought that the laws of God were just and righteous and that the Scriptures gave us a knowledge of these laws. But in ethics we are in doubt what the rights of man are because we do not yet know man. We are not satisfied with formal phrases of equality because we see so many abstract uses of the term, wherein the old equality straightway turns into inequality. Equality before the law, for example, may mean inequality, because of inability to provide a good lawyer. It sends the poor man to

prison when he cannot pay his fine and takes from the rich the price of a box of cigars for the same offense. We shall not know what is right, what is just, in any full sense until we know more of the powers of human life and the means by which these may be freed and enlarged. This points a task for theology. Its older conceptions of sin and evil, of justice and atonement, we well know have been largely shaped by legal minds. It is the task of constructive thought to find new interpretations which are more adequate than the legal for the undoubted facts of human, moral experience.

APOSTOLIC CHRISTOLOGY: A COMPARISON OF PAUL WITH HIS PREDECESSORS

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In studying comparisons between apostolic teachings it is well to bear in mind that the New Testament has a genetic element far more important than its variants. Particularly is this true in the case of Christology. Neither Paul nor his predecessors manufactured the messianic concept. Each, however, used it in his own way. A comparison such as is given in MR. LINDEMANN'S article will help to at least realize these two elements.

One cannot enter very far upon a study of this subject without seeing plainly that the New Testament doctrines were formulated, immediately, at least, if not mainly, as apologetics. The absurd impossibility of a slain Messiah gave the first preachers their task. They must persuade Judaism that this was not an absurdity but a providence. Paul had the same task in so far as his audi-

ences were Jews. Indeed, the death of the Messiah was something he had to adjust to his own consciousness, for he had been one of those for whom the cross was a stumbling-block. Otherwise the antitheses against which his message shaped itself were furnished by paganism and Hellenic thought, especially in its phases of Stoicism and Gnosticism. When not definitely apologetical, the Pauline doc-